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ABSTRACT

Research on District Decentralized Title I ESEA programs reveals conflict among school officials, community representatives, and community agencies. School officials mistrust and poorly communicate with community representatives. Community agencies compete for the economic resources brought by decentralization, while overlooking the main objective of decentralization, that of the involvement of the community in educational planning. The administrative organization of many projects is faulty. School officials are not directly accountable for the progress of the projects; better monitoring is essential. If decentralized planning and conduct of educational projects is to be effective, there must be greater participation in planning and monitoring the projects by the community. There is also a great need for improved performance on the part of school officials in the area of administration and supervision, and a greater willingness to accept and respond to criticism. (JM)

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SOME IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH ON DECENTRALIZED CONTROL OF EDUCATION *

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One of the salient findings from our research [1,2,3] on decentralization is confirmation of the reports concerning conflict between school officials and community representatives on educational matters. The central point of contention involves decisions about type of programs, the use of paraprofessionals, and selection of professional personnel. Many of the disagreements stem from philosophical differences about who should make educational policy and who should hire and fire personnel.

Another observation is that some of the school officials do not trust the judgment of the community representatives. Most of the community representatives are serious in their attempts to understand the problems of the school officials and to try to help develop solutions, but some of the school representatives do not communicate well with them. There is great variability among school officials both in terms of their administrative ability and in their commitment to decentralization.

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[1] District Decentralized Title I, ESEA Programs, Roscoe C. Brown, Jr.,, The Center for Urban Education, New York, New York, December 1968.

[2] Summer District Decentralized Programs, Roscoe C. Brown, Jr., The Center for Urban Education, New York, New York, December 1968.

[3] District Decentralized Projects, Roscoe C. Brown, Jr., The Center for Urban Education, New York, New York, December 1969.

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The determination of whether the decentralized programs will contribute more to the education of the children in the schools than the more traditional educational programs must await further research. The test of the hypothesis that decentralization will improve the quality of education in local communities involves comparisons of the outcomes of programs developed under centralized and decentralized controls. It is important that empirical research be conducted on the outcomes of the various types of decentralized programs in order to obtain more insight into the effectiveness of the decentralized programs.

Our research indicates the need for the community agencies to work together more effectively. Community agencies seem to vary in their understanding of the purpose of the decentralized projects. Some feel that the provision of jobs for community members is one of the main purposes of decentralization. While the provision of jobs is a desirable side effect of the decentralized programs, the major objective of decentralization is to provide opportunities for the involvement of the community in educational planning. Plans for programs sometimes have gone askew because the community representatives do not trust each other or compete with each other for the same projects and the same children. If decentralization is to be effective, it is imperative that community agencies develop ways of working together so that they can be more effective in developing and improving educational opportunities for their constituents.

While it is not possible to generalize about all decentralized progress from the limited number of evaluations in which I have participated, certain observations can be made that have

relevance to the factors involved in the conduct of decentralized Title I projects.

The major problem in many of the projects seems to be administrative organization. There is a large gap between the objectives of the projects and the various administrative mechanisms that are followed in order to implement them. Too often, requests made for assignment of personnel, purchase of equipment, and changes of schedule are handled in an ineffective manner. There are many causes of these problems, but, in the main, they stem from lack of follow through by both school and community people.

Another problem is the lack of direct accountability. There have been no consistent attempts on the part of the school officials or the community representatives to monitor the projects and attempt to correct problems as they occur. It is necessary that school officials be held responsible for knowing what is happening on a day-to-day basis, and if something is wrong, taking steps to remedy the situation. Admittedly this is a large order, but better monitoring of programs must be carried out in order to imporve the chances for success of various educational innovations. Decentralization of city school systems, which are large and complex, will require even more involvement in education on the part of community representatives if they are to perform a major role in the process of accountability. Research will play a large part in providing data for whatever processes are developed to insure accountability.

Some important conclusions can be derived about the process of decentralized planning and operation of educational programs

from the research that I have done. Although school officials are required to consult with community representatives in the implementation of plans for decentralization, many school officials do not value the opinions of the community and do what they want to do without involving the community. In districts where the school officials try to involve the community representatives and utilize their judgments in planning programs, the attitude of the community representatives is more positive than where school officials show a certain amount of hostility to the participation of community residents in determining educational policy. If decentralized planning and conduct of educational projects is to be effective, there must be greater participation in planning and monitoring the projects by the community. While there is fiscal accountability to Boards of Education, there is inadequate program accountability to both the Boards of Education or the community. The findings of our research suggest that there needs to be more involvement of the community in the process of educational accountability as well as the process of program planning. There is also a great need for improved performance on the part of school officials in the area of administration and supervision and a greater willingness on their part to accept and respond to criticism. Both of these ingredients are necessary for decentralized control of education to have a fair test.